



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

GULF OIL SPILL Q&A

May 5, 2010

- Is my **water** safe to drink?

At this point, the oil spill is not expected to affect public drinking water supplies or private well water.

- Are **shellfish and fin fish** safe to eat?

Any fish available for commercial sale, for example, fish in grocery stores, comes from non-contaminated waters. Contaminated fish and seafood will not be allowed on the market by regulatory agencies. However, based on common sense, if a fish obtained from any source smells or tastes like oil, do not eat it.

- Are **swimming and boating** safe?

Do not swim, ski, or paddle a surfboard in any waters visibly affected by oil. Do not drive your boat through oil slicks or sheens.

- Is it safe to **sit on the beach, walk barefooted and dip my feet in the surf**?

Heed any beach advisories, and use common sense. You want to avoid any areas with visible oil.

- Is the **odor** harmful? What happens if I breathe the **oil mist**?

Petroleum fumes can be an irritant for some people. The odor may cause symptoms such as lightheadedness, nausea, vomiting or headaches. If you have these symptoms, you should:

- Consider staying indoors, ventilating your home with air conditioning, and avoiding strenuous outdoor activity.
- If these symptoms do not improve, or if you are experience severe nausea or other medical issues, you should then consider contacting your primary care physician or other health care provider for medical advice.

- What if I am having **breathing problems**?

Some people may be sensitive to any change in air quality, which could cause respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms, stay indoors, ventilate your home with air conditioning, and avoid strenuous outdoor activity. If these symptoms do not improve, you should consider contacting your primary care physician or other health care provider for medical advice, especially if you have pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory illness.

- What if I get **oil on myself** or my clothing?

You should avoid direct contact with the oil, or oil-contaminated water or sediment.

- If you get oil on your skin, wash it off with soap and water.
- Wash your hands before eating to avoid accidentally swallowing oil.
- If you get oil on clothing, wash it as you normally would.
- Prolonged exposure to the oil may cause some to have a skin rash.
- There is no need to use harsh detergents, solvents, or other chemicals to wash oil from your skin or clothing, and their use is discouraged.

- Is any **air monitoring** being done?

EPA responders began portable monitoring of air quality on April 28 and began water sampling on April 30. Aircraft were deployed to collect air sample data and provide aerial photographs and will continue tracking. The results of EPA's sampling efforts will be posted at www.epa.gov/bpspill. EPA will make recommendations for the public to take based upon the results of environmental monitoring. In addition, the Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health (under contract with BP) is monitoring air quality between Venice, La., and Pensacola, Fla.

- What are the **long-term health effects**?

Based on what we know now, if exposure is brief, long-term health effects are not anticipated.

For the latest information or if you have questions, call 1-866-519-6362 (MEMA) or the Mississippi Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.